

The Mysterious Ways of Wang Foo By Sidney C. Partridge

The Bamboo Idol

"WELL, Morehead," said Inspector Gubbins of the Shanghai police to his chief assistant, "that batch is settled anyhow. We won't have any more barber rows on the Harris wharf for a little while now. The mixed court magistrate gave them sixty blows apiece and two weeks' wooden cangue on the spot where the fight took place. You know, it isn't such a bad idea, this punishing a man on the place where he commits the crime; it gives them all a good chance to see justice administered."

"That's so, chief," answered the assistant. "I've sometimes thought it wouldn't be so far out of the way to have a little of it in the old country. That's what they used to do in the old days of the stocks and whipping post, you know, and, after all, the wooden cangue is only another form of stocks. But doesn't it remind you of the Arabian Nights, this silly nonsense about barbers? Just think of a fight in London and a lot of barber chaps nearly killing each other just because they didn't go to the same church! They're worse than Mohammedans, they really are."

"Is that what started it? I didn't hear the first of the evidence."

"Why, yes; you see two old barbers of the Barbers' Guild have had the monopoly of shaving the coolies on the Harris wharf for years, and yesterday along came a couple of new chaps who don't belong to the guild and don't worship the same barbers' idol and set up their shop, and up starts the fight with those Chinese razors. They're sharp, too; the second mate of the Shoo Pow, who rushed into separate them, came near being badly cut."

"Just another case of 'Him no chin-chin same joss,' as Detective Chang says when I ask him what starts the ordinary street wheel-barrow fight, eh?"

"They certainly are mighty clan-ish, sir."

The foregoing conversation between the inspector and his assistant in the inner police office was hardly over when a knock was heard at the door and the native officer on duty brought in the chit-book from the British consulate and handed a message marked "urgent" to his chief.

"Well, here we are again; I wonder what's up now? Perhaps the barbers are at it once more."

"Perhaps it's a lot of their friends come down to the wharf to get even with the other fellows. They often do that, you know."

The inspector tore open the envelope, saying as he did so to the officer: "You tellee coolie waitchee answer."

The message read as follows:

To Inspector Arthur Gubbins, Shanghai Police: Sir—In the absence of Mr. Thomas Bradley, K. C. M. G., the consul general, I beg to request your presence, without delay, at the consulate, to consult about a disturbance of a very serious nature that took place in the Settlement last evening. I am, sir, very truly yours, W. M. WALPOLE, H. B. M. Vice Consul, in Charge.

Handing a reply to the waiting messenger, the inspector turned to Mr. Morehead and asked, as he passed the paper over to him: "What's this? Any report from headquarters or from the branch station about a row last night?"

"Not a word, sir; the docket is all clear."

"Well, perhaps there's some reason for the native officers' keeping it secret. I'll go right over and see what it's about."

He put on his long uniform coat, took his official cap from the hook, and, hurrying out to his waiting jinriksha, ordered the coolie to take him to the consulate. He was ushered at once into the private office and after the usual greetings was asked to take a seat at the consul's desk, the doors having been closed and the curtains closely drawn.

"Gubbins," began his majesty's representative, "I'm in a quandary and I've sent for you to help me out. I've been a good many years in the service and I flatter myself that I know these people pretty well, but every now and then something new turns up and I find myself as puzzled as an ordinary globe-trotter on his first arrival. You have had a good deal of experience in dealing with them, too, but I imagine that sometimes you get into a fix as well as myself and then you have to—"

"Have to send for some old missionary who speaks the local lingo to worm it out of them," said the inspector, helping to finish the sentence.

"Yes, after all, we study and study, but the people who live among them day and night are the only ones who ever really get under their padded vests," as my chief says."

"That's so, and yet, do you know, old Dr. Johnson of the Mission Hospital told me only last week that some times he's just as badly off as we are, and he's been out here forty years and speaks the lingo like a native."

"He's right, he's right—well, here's the case: This morning, when I came down to breakfast, I notice my No. 1 boy had his head all plastered up. I asked him what was the matter and all I could get was, 'My makee faller down stairs last night.' Now that would have gone all right if the No. 2 boy hadn't come in a few minutes later with a bandage around his eye, and when I asked him if he had fallen downstairs, too, he stammered and said, 'My come in velly late, no can see that gate, have hittee eye-side.' I began to be a little suspicious when I saw two of them crippled up, but I could have passed their Chinese yarns even then, if I hadn't met Anderson and Broadmoor at the club this noon and heard them say that there must have been a fine old houseboy fight last night, for boy's their boys had black eyes and other tokens of a scrimmage. And now in comes old Goldman, the bill broker, and asks me what was going on



SUDDENLY A WILD DEMON SHRIEK WAS HEARD AND A MISSILE WAS HURLED THROUGH THE AIR DIRECTLY AT THE GODDESS.

last night out on the Bubbling Well road, for both his boys are laid up and, for all I know, perhaps a dozen others, and yet no one of us can find out a blessed thing about it. There evidently was a big row somewhere, but where or how or why nobody knows."

"That's very strange, sir, for no report has come in to us. I'll go right back and have every officer on night duty examined. But, first, would you mind my calling in the boy and asking him a question or two?"

"Certainly not; I'll ring for him."

The No. 1 boy came promptly.

"Where was that fight last night?" asked the inspector, very pointedly.

"My no savee," was the only reply.

"Call No. 2 boy," said the consul.

"Where was that fight last night, and who gave you that eye?"

"My no savee," was the only satisfaction he received, though the question was repeated several times.

After other ineffectual attempts to get any information out of the stoical servants, the inspector rose and said: "You see, sir, how absolutely impossible it is to get anything out of them; you might just as well address your questions to a stone wall. I'll go back to the office and get the native detectives on this thing at once."

Every Chinese and every Sikh policeman on night duty in the settlement appeared before the chief during the next twenty-four hours and was closely questioned as to the scrimmage in which, up to the latest report from outside, over thirty servants in foreign employ had been badly injured. The only answer was that not a sign of any disturbance had come to their notice!

The inspector was nonplussed and sent for Morehead.

"Call Detective Chang and have him go into this thing thoroughly," said the inspector. "Tell him to use all his native tricks and ferret this thing out. There's been a big fight here, right under our very nose—for these chaps couldn't get far away—and the whole department is responsible for it. Now don't leave a stone unturned."

The wily and skillful Chang and his assistants had the case committed to their charge, but after a week's careful investigation they were obliged to report, in the brief but significant phrase of the house boys, "My no savee." The mystery simply deepened day by day.

"Do you mean to tell me that your entire force isn't able to locate this affair?" asked the consul of the inspector, after the latter had reported to him their somewhat ignominious failure.

"We've done the best we could, sir, but their lips are sealed like the tombs of Egypt. They'll die before they'll let

out a word. You see, if it had been in the native city, we might get at something by torture, but that's again the law in the British settlement. Time is the only thing, sir; if we wait long enough, some one of them will be sure to leak it out, but—"

here he paused for a moment—"It may be months, perhaps years."

"Well, Gubbins, we may as well confess it, we're pretty helpless. Aren't we?"

"I am sorry to say it looks that way, Mr. Walpole."

"Have you thought of getting that clever chap up from Hongkong? He might get at it as an outsider, you know."

"You mean Wang Foo, the Mysterious?"

"Yes, I think that's his name. The one who recovered Lady Evington's jewels in the famous robbery case. Why not send for him—on the quiet, of course—and let him get to work at it, without any suspicion?"

"There's no harm in trying, sir."

And this is why, a week later, Wang Foo bade adieu to the Venerable Grand One at his humble home in the Red Cloud alley, and directed his faithful coolie to carry his pigskin trunk aboard the English mailboat, lying at anchor in the harbor of Hongkong, the "Fragrant Waters."

Not far from the side gate to the European cemetery, on the outer edge of the foreign settlement at Shanghai, is a pathway that winds through a grove of clustering bamboos and brings one to the temple of the Foo Chow Guild. It is a favorite resort of the Fukinese residents of the port, but a white man rarely visits it, for the path is rough and winds by the side of a slimy creek whose waters give forth most offensive odors. Passing through a series of brick white-washed archways, one comes at last to the shrine, which seems old and dilapidated and has nothing of architectural beauty to attract a visitor.

On either side of the court yard are rooms containing the coffins of those who have died in Shanghai and who are awaiting eventual transportation back to the "Foo" or "Happy" province, where their bones will rest in peace by the side of those of their ancestors. Two old priests and a handful of lazy coolies comprise the living outfit. Twice a year, however, the place is a scene of lively ceremonies; in August on the feast of the returning souls and in March, on the birthday of the queen of hades, when the venerable idol of bamboo which stands in the center is exhibited to the admiring and adoring crowds. It is a curious old relic, this idol, scarce

a foot and a half high and delicately carved out of the most popular wood of the country. No one knows how old it is, nor who was the man who made it—the tradition indeed being that it floated down one day from the clouds, on the back of the hairy turtle of the ancient tales. It is, however, the protecting and guardian divinity of all those who come from the Happy province. To it they are bound to pay their devotions and they violate its wishes at their peril. One of its hands holds a slender wand and the other is raised as if in the act of blessing.

One August night, on the eve of the feast of returning souls, a motley crowd were assembled at the shrine. The air was filled with the odor of burning incense, gongs to call back the waiting souls from earth to hades were being beaten and offerings of rice and tea and wine and imitation money were being presented to the queen. Suddenly a wild demon shriek was heard, and as a voice in the crowd called out, "Back to hades with your people, miserable deceiver of humanity!" a missile was hurled through the air directly at the goddess, and, striking the uplifted hand, broke off two of the bamboo fingers, which fell at the feet of the awe-struck devotees. Pandemonium reigned in an instant. Yells and execrations filled the air, and every man seized his neighbor in an attempt to apprehend the desecrator. In the midst of the confusion a tall, wild figure, his face flushed with native wine and his eyes starting from their sockets, broke through the crowd, and, screaming "Away with your worthless bamboo idol!" he dashed toward the gateway and was lost in the darkness before any one could stop him.

"A Ning Po man, a traitor from another province," they cried. "Seize him! Kill him!" It was all too late, he was gone.

After various attempts to restore order and quiet, the form of an old white-bearded man arose and, standing on the upper steps, motioned to silence. The inherent Chinese respect for age secured him a hearing.

"Listen to the old one! Listen to our father!" they cried.

"My children from the Happy province," he said. "We will avenge this insult to our goddess." And raising his long and bony arm toward heaven he cried: "The curse of the Bamboo Queen and the Hairy Turtle be upon the villains from Ning Po."

Shouts of approval greeted this announcement, and there and then the pledge was sealed.

After a quiet night at the home of his

old friends, the Hongkong basketmaker and his family, Wang Foo, attired in the modest gown of the Chinese scholar, presented his card at the office of the inspector of police and was at once admitted to the inner sanctum.

"I am very glad to have the pleasure of meeting you, Mr. Wang. My esteemed predecessor, Inspector Sharpley, has told me of you and of your wondrous ways."

"The pleasure is mine, sir, and it is always a privilege to serve you and the department in the interests of law and justice. You have done me the honor of sending for me and now my time and my talents—such as they are—are entirely at your disposal. As Yuen Yuan, the great disciple of Confucius, said, 'To make no boast of talent nor show of merit were my wish.'"

"There certainly are great things in those ancient books of yours, sir. I often wish that I could read them."

"I would that all Europeans were more familiar with the Master's words," replied the visitor; "it would help them better to understand my people."

"Well, sir, now to the case before us. The morning is ours; let us go into it thoroughly. If you have no objection, Chief Detective Morehead will share the conference with us. He is a splendid fellow and knows all the circumstances as well as I do. May I offer you a mild cheroot, sir?"—opening a fresh box of Manillas—"Capt. Wemyss of the flagship just brought them up from the Philippines. They ought to be good ones, for the old sailor is quite a judge."

Wang Foo with the politest of bows accepted the proffered cigar and the inspector began his tale, while his guest listened most attentively and took the usual copious notes.

"We are face to face, sir, with a most mysterious and, at the same time, a most annoying occurrence, which, if left unsolved, will reflect most seriously upon myself and all the members of the force. The circumstances are briefly these: On a certain morning some twenty-five or thirty houseboys and servants in European employ are discovered to be suffering from cuts and bruises, more or less serious, which were evidently the result of a midnight scrimmage somewhere in the settlement. We have made the most thorough investigation, but up to the present time we cannot find a trace of the place where it occurred or of any of the circumstances. Everything is reported officially, as having been perfectly quiet that night throughout the entire district, yet every one of these boys bears the marks of a most serious row."

After answering several detailed questions of Wang Foo, he continued: "The strangest thing about it all is that these are not coolies or rowdies at all, but the quietest and most law-abiding class of native servants, and not one of them has ever been up before the police for a disturbance. Now, what in the name of goodness could be the motive for such an attack upon them—for attack it evidently was—and, furthermore, why are they so everlastingly mum about it? They have done all in their power to conceal the effects of it, and every mother's son of them has declared it was an accident or his own fault—of course, a perfect pack of lies from beginning to end."

The Chinese detective thought long and carefully and, after referring again to the little leather-covered notebook which he had drawn from his sleeve, propounded to the foreign officers these three inquiries:

"You were quite positive that all the boys who were injured belonged to the house and not to the office staff?"

"Yes, sir, I believe every one of them was a domestic servant. But what possible difference could that make?"

Wang Foo's only answer, as he lighted another cheroot out of the box, was a quiet but significant smile.

"There were no coolies or horseboys injured in any way?"

"No, sir, as far as we know, every one seems to have been either a number one or a number two tableboy."

"Just one thing more, Mr. Gubbins; did you notice at all carefully the nature or form or shape of the wounds or bruises? Have you any theory as to the kind of instrument or weapon they were inflicted with? Anything foreign or native? And were they apparently all inflicted with the same club or knife—or whatever it was?"

Assistant Morehead answered for his chief:

"Yes, there was one queer thing about it. I noticed it when we had them up here for examination and I made them unroll the bandages. Many of the scars looked like a three-pointed star."

"What kind of star, sir, did you say? A three-pointed star?"

"Yes, a sort of three-pointed star with one point longer than the other two. Don't you remember my saying, chief, that they all must have seen stars—that was my little joke, don't you know?"

Wang Foo arose and prepared to leave.

"Gentlemen, this requires careful study and, above all, secrecy. I will call upon you again in exactly ten days and let you know the results. In the meantime you will consider, if you please, that I am still—as far as the public is concerned—lying quietly in Hongkong. Good morning!"

"Ten days," said the inspector, after the visitor had departed; "ten days, Morehead, make a careful note of the date and don't let anything interfere with your being here all day, mind that."

"I'll be right on deck, sir; you can rely on me for that. And in the meantime, I suppose"—placing his forefinger on his lips—"mum's the word, sir?"

"Mum's the word," replied the chief as he rang the office bell for his jinriksha.

In the quiet and retirement of the upper room in the basketmaker's house, the man of mystery was at work nightly upon the problem. A week had already passed by since his interview with the officers, and slowly, one by one, he was forging the links in the chain of evidence.

Two things were already perfectly clear: first, it was an interprovincial row and, second, it must have been in some way associated with the provincial honor, or they would not have leagueed themselves together to keep it secret. Fear of some kind had sealed their lips. Fear of what? Evidently of the anger of some local god. As regards the former, every victim was in the house-boy class and a careful list of the homes where they were employed showed that, without exception, they were Ning Po